

All Visitors Welcome

Accessibility in State Park Interpretive Programs and Facilities

Fifth Edition

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—Erika Porter, 1994

Introduction

For more than a century, millions of visitors have come to California State Parks to enjoy this state's diverse natural and cultural resources. Many come to participate in our parks' educational and recreational programs, even though they may have difficulty understanding what is said, seeing what is discussed, and accessing the facilities. Unfortunately, thousands more have missed viewing scenic areas or experiencing cultural and historical sites because they feared, often justifiably, such areas or facilities would be inaccessible to them.

The policy of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to meet the recreational needs of all the people of California and to provide an accessible environment in which all visitors to the State Park System are given the opportunity to understand, appreciate, and participate in the state's cultural, historical, and natural heritage. Parks that offer visitors physical access to interpretive facilities and resources cannot be considered totally accessible unless the staff can also effectively communicate with visitors who have disabilities. Access to both facilities and programs is equally important.



In 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law. It directed that people with disabilities must be allowed to participate in regular programs and that they could not be discriminated against or treated separately because of their disabilities. In compliance with this law, state parks may not refuse to allow a person to participate in a

service, program, or activity simply because the individual has a disability. Programs and services must be in an integrated setting, unless separate or different measures are necessary to ensure equal opportunity. If a separate program is offered, individuals may still choose to participate in the standard program. Also, state parks must furnish auxiliary aids and services upon request. Although not considered disabled, persons with limited English proficiency and older adults are discussed in this handbook because they too can benefit from simple modifications or additions to interpretive programs and facilities.

It is important to keep in mind that the Department must view each program (including site access) in its entirety and make every reasonable attempt to ensure each program is readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. Where the burden to create accessibility would fundamentally alter the nature of a program, the decision for non-compliance must be made by the head of the public entity and must be accompanied by an on-file written statement of the reasons for reaching that conclusion. State Parks must then create a suitable alternative that will nevertheless ensure that individuals with disabilities receive the benefits or services provided (film, slide show, or photographs, for example). When making a decision for non-compliance, or when selecting a suitable alternative, consultation with a District Accessibility Resource Group (DARG) is recommended.

This handbook has been written to provide state park staff with information that will guide them in developing accessible interpretive programs and facilities. It has three purposes:

- To educate park staff about the most common disabilities, thereby improving their understanding of, and their ability to effectively communicate with, all visitors.
- To provide suggestions for making existing park interpretive programs more accessible to people with disabilities, so they can participate in and enjoy them together with their families and friends.
- To inform park staff of State and Federal facility access requirements, along with additional suggestions applicable to park interpretive facilities.

Please take the time to review and understand this handbook's recommendations and use them at every opportunity. As a volunteer, seasonal, or permanent employee, making interpretive programs and facilities accessible is your responsibility. Through your efforts, all visitors will be welcome and given the opportunity to have an enjoyable and satisfying park experience.

How to Use This Book

This handbook has been designed as a convenient reference for planning programs and delivering them to our visitors, many of whom will have some type of disability.

- Read the Types of Disabilities section to become more familiar with the most common disabilities.
- When planning a specific program, review the suggestions offered in the Interpretive Programs section.
- Refer to the Interpretive Facilities section to evaluate and improve access to the program's site.

For example, when preparing a campfire program, first review the *Types of Disabilities* section, then read about Campfire Programs, and familiarize yourself with the suggestions offered. Also, read the section in Interpretive Facilities on Amphitheaters and Campfire Centers. Understand and evaluate the level of accessibility of the area, and where possible, make necessary adjustments.

Suggestions are often repeated throughout the Types of Disabilities and Interpretive Programs sections because they may apply to more than one type of disability or program. The Tips and Techniques Tables beginning on page 151 show which suggestions are useful for different types of disabilities.

The following abbreviations are used throughout this handbook:

ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act

ADAAG - *Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines*

PAG - *California State Parks Accessibility Guidelines*

CA - *California State Accessibility Standards*



